How to Use the Library: The Print Collection

Video Transcript

Hello and welcome back. In this section, we’ll discuss how to use the print collection here at the J. W. Martin Library. Basically, I’m going to discuss how the collection is arranged on the shelves. Even if you’re one of our distance learners or concurrent students and are unlikely to visit our Alva campus, I encourage you to watch this video, as the information here will be applicable to most other libraries you’ll use in the future.

Dewey Decimal System

Now, at some point in your life, you’ve probably heard of the Dewey Decimal System. Basically, the Dewey Decimal System is a means of arranging books in a library in a systematic and consistent way, invented by a man named Melvil Dewey.

The Dewey Decimal System arranges all of human knowledge into ten broad categories, each represented by a range of numbers. And then it further subdivides them from there.

Although you might look here to see what range is most relevant to your major, I don’t expect you to memorize this table. One of the great things about the Dewey Decimal System is, you can find books without knowing how the system works.

Anytime you look up a book in our catalog, you’ll get what’s called a call number. Here’s a screenshot from the catalog, and there’s the call number right there. So now take a look at our shelves. You can see that they have a range of numbers printed on them. So you just pick the shelf that has the range covering the book you’re looking for, and you should be able to find your book.
And if you can’t find it, of course, you can always ask the library staff. It’s not really like we have anything else to do.

**Cutter Numbers**

You may have already noticed that there’s a second set of letters and numbers on the books after the Dewey number. So what is that? No, seriously, what is that? That’s what’s called a Cutter number named after the man who invented it Charles Ammi cutter. Basically, it’s a code that’s a shortened version of an author’s name. The first letter is always the first letter of the author’s name, and then a series of numbers follows after that. Again, you don’t need to know exactly how the system works. The only thing to keep in mind is that the numerals in a Cutter number are ordered as if they come after a decimal point, which is why in our example here, you can see that 762 comes after 7393.

Now we’ve talked about several things: call numbers, Dewey decimal numbers, Cutter numbers ... but what’s most important to remember is that the books are arranged in numerical order on the shelves. So if you have the number you can get the book. Or, again, ask a librarian for help.

**Sections of the Library**

**Archives**

We have a few other features in the library. Upstairs is an archives with Oklahoma history books and unpublished manuscripts related to the university.

**Biography**

We also have a large biography collection. You might have noticed before that biographies fall in the 900s in the Dewey system. But here we have them separated out
in their own section, so they will have a B instead of a Dewey number. If you find a book in the catalog marked with the letter B instead of a number, that’s a biography.

**Recent Releases**

We also have a section of recent releases including new books and bestsellers. There’s nonfiction in this collection, which will have Dewey numbers like usual, but there’s also fiction, which is marked with an F.

**Children’s Collection**

Upstairs, for the School of Education, we have a collection of children’s literature including both fiction and nonfiction. Non-fiction has Dewey numbers and fiction has an F again. To distinguish the children’s books from the rest of the collection, all of these books are marked with the letters L.S. after their call numbers.

Why L.S.?

Honestly, I have no idea.

**Conclusion**

So that was a quick rundown of the library’s print collection.

Remember if you want it or need it and can’t find it, please ask us. We’re there to help you.